

THE GOWANUS CANAL WAS ONCE THE SACRED AREA OF THE CANARSEE INDIAN TRIBE. SHAMANS LIVED IN THE AREA APART FROM THE TRIBAL VILLAGES. EVEN TODAY, MANY NATIVE AMERICANS RESIDE IN THE AREA. THIS PROPOSAL IS DESIGNED TO RETURN THE AREA TO A NATURAL & ECOLOGICALLY HEALTHY STATE. ALL BUILDINGS ON THE CANAL WILL BE RAZED AND A FOREST WILL BE PLANTED IN ITS STEAD. MATERIALS FROM THESE DEMOLISHED BUILDINGS WILL BE RECYCLED AND USED TO CONSTRUCT 3 SKYSCRAPERS. ALL PEOPLE IN THE AREA WILL BE ALLOWED TO CHOOSE THE BUILDING IN WHICH THEY WILL RESIDE. DIFFERENT INCOMES WILL BE ACCOMODATED WITHIN EACH BUILDING; LOWER INCOMES WILL OCCUPY THE LOWER PORTION OF EACH SKYSCRAPER. EACH STRUCTURE IS UNIQUE AND WILL APPEAL TO A DIFFERENT TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL. REDBRICK TOWERS WILL FEATURE BRICK FIREPLACES, WOODEN FLOORS AND LOW CEILINGS. CONTEMPORA CITY WILL FEATURE COMPUTERS, ELECTRONIC ACCESS AND JACUZZIS. PAUMONOCK PLAZA, AN ARTIST HOUSING PROJECT, WILL OFFER STUDIO SPACE AND WEIRD INTERIORS. IN FACT, THE TOTAL BUILDING WILL BE A SCULPTURE. EACH SKYSCRAPER WILL FUNCTION AS A COMPACT AND SEPARATE COMMUNITY. UNDERGROUND PASSAGeways WILL NOT ONLY CONNECT THE 3 SKYSCRAPERS BUT ALSO LEAD TO STORES, SHOPPING MALLS AND BUSINESSES. GEOTHERMAL POWER WILL PROVIDE HEAT AND ELECTRICITY. WITHIN THE FOREST WILL ONCE AGAIN RESIDE INDIAN SETTLEMENTS. ALL POLITICAL OFFICIALS WILL LIVE AS SHAMANS IN THE FOREST SETTLEMENTS.

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE OF THE GOWANUS CANAL

I had been enamored with the Gowanus canal area just as it is now , since I was a child. I remember riding with my parents on the way to visit relatives on Ocean Parkway. Thru neighborhood after neighborhood of neat brownstones, with tidy rows and a certain clean busyness about the people I saw walking there. There was also a wholesome quality about the scale and the color of the architecture. I bring up these issues because there would be a point where the car would round a corner and the magnificent power of the elevated subway trestle and the bridges on 9th St. and the canal itself, so dark, so black, inscrutable.

It always seemed empty, devoid of human habitation. Factories, warehouses, empty lots and fences. Strange industrial towers and smokestacks. The denizens of this place seemed to me then to be the worshippers of a dark and bitter god. But I asked myself even then, with my eyes wide and my nose pressed against the window whether I would live here later on in life.

After being evicted from my Greenwich Village digs and about the same time as some successful painting shows in Manhattan, I moved in with Sandy Charet in Park Slope. It was close to Prospect Park and was loaded with cool sexy professionals. In short, it was not my thing.

Frank Albee

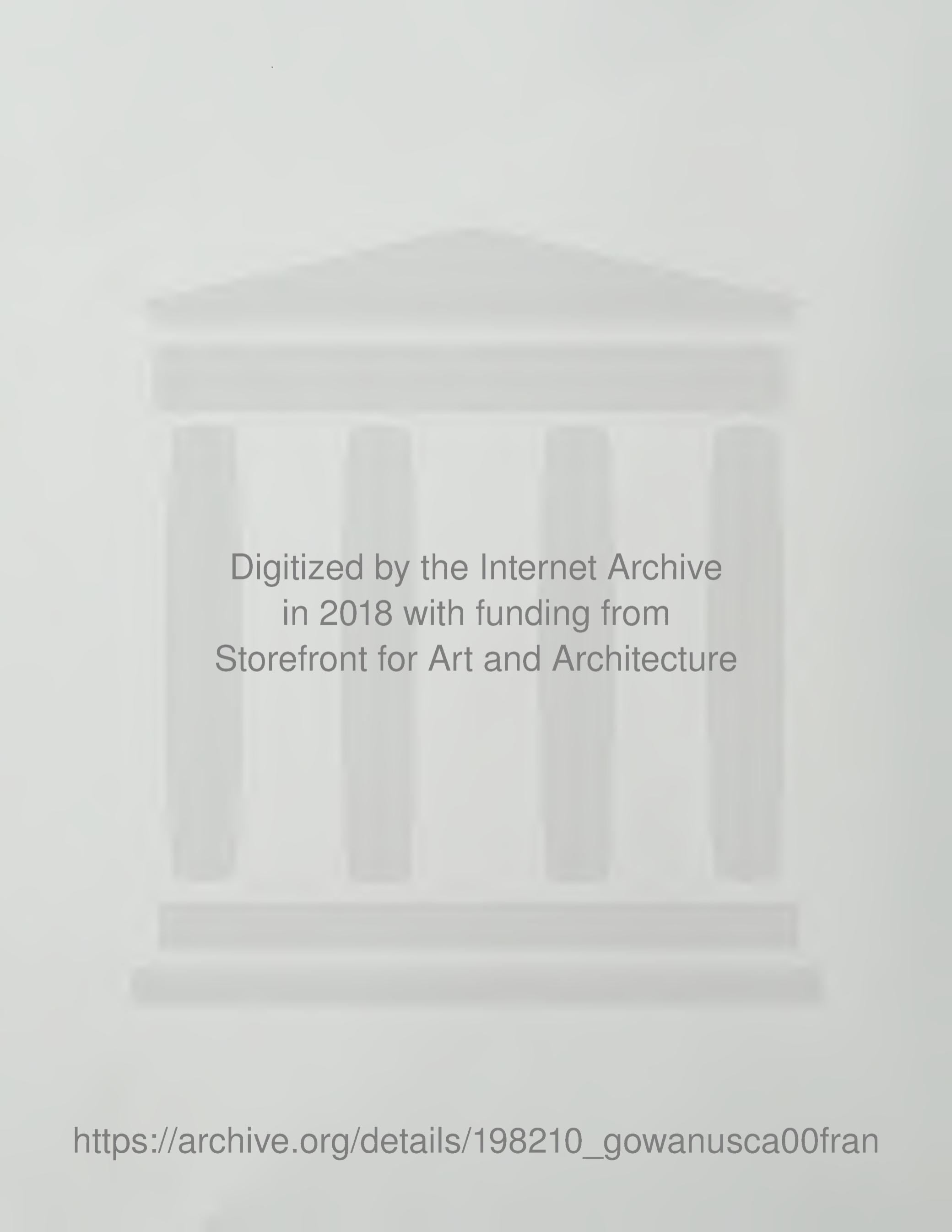
I found this place where I am living now and will have to leave soon. It seemed perfect. An incredible amount of space and light directly overlooking that area that I used to see as a child.

I discovered the history of the building. It had been built to serve the burgeoning industrial revolution after the Gowanus creek was widened into a canal for the shipping of raw materials and finished goods. This was about 1850. Before the Civil War it was converted into a munitions factory. The building was used by a myriad of types of industry since it was built.

I found out other historical facts about the area. The Dutch bought the land from the Canarsee Indians about 1639. The foundation for the original farmhouse can still be seen at the park between 4th and 5th ave on 3rd St. The house was used as the headquarters for Gen. Howe and the English army during the battle of Long Island against Washington and the Revolutionary army. That's just 500 feet from my house. Ebbett started Baseball in that park, at least pro-ball.

The Canrsee Indian name for the area which is still in use was Gawannee. The name means the sleeper or a place of rest in the ir language.

Frank Murphy



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Uncovering the history of the area was like unpeeling the onion skin. The social archeology became a personal iconography of my own soul. Layers of my personality duplicated the historical associations with the area.

And as I got closer to the Indian perception of the Gowannee and its environs I felt that I was existing at a much deeper level of my self.

Being in contact with a deep dream state and the message from that,

I have thought deeply about how to sum up my feelings about this Gowanus area and the canal and they are ambivalent as hell.

On one hand I love the giant castings and smokestacks, the toxic waste and the emptiness. Its kind of macho and destructive and spiritual in a nazi and destructive way. It definitely has the aura of male power and industrial paternalism.

But I hate the canal also. Who likes pollution and the destruction of a biosphere ? A fisherman recently told me That the Canal was the biggest polluter of the Hudson estuary and spawning grounds. My great building will probably be condemned for toxic mercury waste. Even now in these seemingly empty Gowanus warehouses demons are brewing up terrible aromatic chemicals of a most vile nature

Fred Moyer

Scott Siken and I approached Jim Albano and "Buddy" Scotto about support from the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corp. for a sequel to the "Monumental show" which were in my lofts in 1981 and which I co-organized with Mike Keane and George Moore I was in for a big surprise. Not only were they two of the most interesting people that I had met in a very long time and savvy in diverse areas, they took the concept that we had started and ran with it.

Our original concept of the monument was a fusion of art, society, and government. We had looked at the symbols of older or prehistorical cultures where there seemed a closer integration of the individual in Society. There were no isolated artists, elitist, embittered, members of a "Avant-Garde". There was no solipsistic, sophist "art for arts sake" arguer but art which would communicate the spirit and the archetype and yet be practical at the same time.

Jim and Buddy proposed a architectural competition. Jim had just done a study of the work of Sant'Elia, the great Italian futurist architect. Sant'Elia proposed holistic communities of living and working which were beautiful, perhaps ultimately impractical, and yet far ahead of their time

History of Gowanus Canal
Redefined

The Idea of a local community group sponsoring what would amount to a grass roots architectural competition might not be new, but it was not part of our experience.

Architecture has always been part of the fine arts, and yet a kind of moderating force between the visionary and the practical. They have to deal with the real as opposed to the ideal.

There is a coming fusion in the world of art and architecture. There is a new movement of "functional art" that relates to practical ideas and utilitarian concepts-functioning systems that are not just the products of designers subservient to the cause of industry and fashion.

The only element that changes is the individuals attitude to his or her own work. It is the difference between the definition of the word artist and artisan..

We were looking for visionary and practical applications to redesign the Gowanus Canal area. We would accept them from artists , architects or just about anyone what wanted to submit one. The Gowanus Canal C.D.C. would provide a 1000 dollar award. The judges would be a panel of leaders in the arts and government.

Frank Shifreen



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